

down 4th Street.' Consequently, they do really desperate things in Port Arthur or places like that.

Port Arthur is a state of mind I understand; a figment of respectability; the longest journeys take us out of there and back again, back again. If you'd gone back again, again, maybe you'd finally see it doesn't matter; the closer you come to it, the further away it gets. Like singing louder to drive out ugly things; it can kill you, at the very least destroy the voice.

Still, as an ordinary house-woman said to me yesterday, apropos her station in life & her appointments: Is this all there is?

However, if you understand any of this at all, you'd still be in Port Arthur.

I've been told that in certain hospitals, well hidden from us, we are keeping alive men whose faces, if we let them loose, would frighten us. Not just blind, armless men; but really disgusting men. We would like to call them vegetables, except that's not it at all. Vegetables are quite beautiful; they have their form; they maintain it, generation after generation. Also they are useful.

I'd like to make a recommendation, here & now, that we set those people loose on the streets; let's look at them.

-- Margot Treitel

Columbia, MD

Shane

He rode into the valley with his wide brim hat way down
almost over his eyes
but tall in the saddle
even though Alan Ladd was, I heard, only about five-five.
I was just a wide-eyed, freckle-faced kid
but much dirtier than Brandon De Wilde.
Shane did everything so slick and easy:
the way he pushed his wide brim hat back on his forehead
with just a nudge of his thumb;
the way he dismounted in a single flowing motion;
the way he worked the pump handle up and down so smooth
and steady;
and I never seen a man hold a water dipper so firm
yet so gentle
in all my eight years in Wyoming.

He and Dad hit it off real good right from the start
and made quite a team, clearing the land
particularly the big old symbolic tree stump Dad had
hacked at

for eight years without hardly budging.

But he and Shane, not using the team like Ma
with her practical ways suggested,
uprooted it with just manpower, which Dad said was the
fitting way to do it.

And afterwards they just stood there across from each other
their eyes meeting over that important stump but not
saying a word

because words are useless at a time like that.

Oh, it was good in those days with Dad and Shane
working like clydesdales and sweating good honest sweat,
and me practicing to be a fast draw,
and Ma cooking biscuits and flapjacks in the morning
and burning an occasional pie in the afternoon
when Shane would get her all flustered
with his polite ways and occasional pat on the behind.
Oh, I wished that time would go on forever
even though Shane had hid his gun in a blanket
and now wore dungarees two sizes too big
but never big enough to cover
the rippling motion of his lean, hard, brown body.

But as I come to know since, good times like that don't
last.

Eventually Dad and Shane, or Shane and Dad as I often
put it now,
for I'm sure he was becoming more and more a father
figure for me,
had to go to Grafton's for more salt and barbed wire,
flour and axe handles,
a trip that could have been uneventful
if I hadn't asked for a bottle of sody pop.
Oh, why did I, even in all my thirst and idolatry,
insist that Shane bring me a bottle of sody pop?
Gosh agorry, it's downright confusing for a boy
to meet up with Fate, Hubris, and Nemesis all at the
age of eight.

The first trip in, Shane controlled his temper
despite the sneers and taunts:

'Do you hear that, fellows, this pig farmer wants
sody pop!'

And I'm sure it got worse than that, but at eight
your dirty vocabulary is limited if you've only
lived in Wyoming.

All the while you know Shane was seething inside
his dungarees.

You can just push a man like Shane so far.

And when they did it next time
Shane showed what he was: a ruthless fighting machine
but beautiful to watch.
Five against one. I warned him but all he said
in his soft and resolute tones was:
'Bobby, boy, would you have me run away?'
I'd never want Shane to run from anything
unless maybe it was a girl, because I still hate girls.
Dad says I'll feel different in a couple years but I
hope not.
Take that Sally Johnson for instance, she's always trying
to kiss me and feel under my shirt.
But I'm getting off the track.
Was it the perfume from Sally's dress
that made me so digress?

Well, they did gang up on Shane, but he was whuppin'
them pretty good
'till Red caught him with a sneak shot from behind
cracking his head open with a sody pop bottle,
which was sort of ironic as well as painful.
Shane didn't go down because Curly held him up
for Morgan to hit, his ring cutting Shane bad
when I hear this roar at the door, like a wild bull moose.
It was Dad! I think I saw fire snort out of his nose.
He and Shane stood back to back and larruped them all
good and proper.
At times during the fight it seemed to me they almost
enjoyed
getting punched.
They would let out wild yells, that were sort of scary,
and then tear at the bad men like wild demons.
You could tell they knew they couldn't lose.
Then afterwards they stood there over the fallen bodies
looking at each other, eyes meeting but not saying a word,
because words are useless at a triumphant moment like
that.

Well, as you might imagine this all got Fletcher real mad
and he started to burn barns and stampede cattle all
over the valley
so much so I could hardly find a place to play.
He even hired a fast gun so's no one would fight back.
It got so bad all the farmers threatened to leave the
valley
and blamed Dad for getting them to come there in the
first place,
which I thought was a childish conclusion on their part
but tactfully kept quiet.
Dad, though, seemed to take it personal.
At any rate he decided it was up to him
to have a showdown with Fletcher and his gunman Wilson
which was just what Fletcher wanted, of course.
Ma was beside herself, whining and crying

over her pots and pans and trays of biscuits,
wringing her hands in her apron,
begging him to think about me and her if he didn't care
for himself.

But Dad stood up from the dinner table,
taller than I ever remember him,
and said he wouldn't want us to have any other memory
of him.

He knew he couldn't beat Wilson to the draw
but figured he was strong enough to get off one shot
before he went down.

Just as he was about to leave, with his rusty gun strapped
on,

there in the doorway -- Shane.

No dungarees now but the clothes he rode in with.

'Sartor Resartus,' I heard my mother gasp.

Tight black trousers, unquestionably expensive serge,
tucked into tall black boots,

a white shirt of the finest linen, with a black shoestring
necktie

and his hat once again down almost over his eyes.

I often wondered how he could see like that.

'You ain't going, Joe,' he said in soft, firm tones.

You knew he meant it.

'This is my kind of fight,' and when Dad made a move,
Shane whipped out his gun and hit Dad flush along side
of the head,

a dirty move but a necessary one, I decided.

The end will justify the means!

Quick as a cat he had his gun back in the holster and
caught Dad
before he fell and carried him to the couch.

'He's a good man, Mirian,' he told Ma. 'I knew he'd try
it.

But tell him when he wakes

No man need be ashamed of being beat by Shane.'

Then Shane and Ma sat there looking at each other
over the unconscious form of Dad

eyes meeting but not saying a word

because, I guess, words are useless at a time like that.
Like what?

Was Shane in love with Ma?

Was Ma ready to run off with Shane?

These questions I ask now although they didn't occur to
me then,
perhaps due to the tension and drama of the moment.

Well, you remember what happened after that.

I followed him into town where at Grafton's
he gunned down Wilson with a draw that was a blur,
then cut down Fletcher, too, who was sniping
like a dirty rattler from the balcony.

Only then did I notice a red blotch on Shane's shirt
that was getting bigger.

And he never flinched once.
Gosh agorry could that man stand pain.

Don't believe the movie version,
I didn't go running after shouting his name in that high grating voice.

I called to him softly as he came out of Grafton's
staggering slightly as though he had one too many,
which is funny because no bottle could ever get the best
of Shane.

I'll never forget his words:
'A man's what he is, Bob, and there's no breaking the mold.'

You got to admit there's a lot of tragic truth to that.
See what I mean about Fate and all?
Then he reminisced for a while, holding his bleeding side,
about the first day he rode into the valley and saw me
on the fence,

dirty kid that I was,
but then he grew sad when I asked him to come home.
'There's no going back from a killing, Bob. Right or wrong

the brand sticks and there's no going back.
It's up to you now. Go home, grow up,
grow big and strong
and take care of them.'

'I will Shane,' I answered although highly
confused as to why they needed cared for.
Tears started to my eyes.
Then he said as he looked down the road toward the open plain:

'There's only one thing more I can do for them now.'
We just stood there looking at each other
eyes meeting but not saying a word
because words are useless at a time like that --
although actually I didn't understand what he meant.
Maybe that's why I didn't call after him
as he rode, tall in the saddle, bleeding from the side,
out of the valley.

But I know now,
everybody should meet Shane sometime
even though he might not be ready for catharsis at the
moment.

Shane didn't speak much
but he said a lot.
And no eight year old need be ashamed
of not having understood Shane.

-- Charles Stetler

Long Beach, CA